

400 per cent increase in a century

Population growth under attack

By BEVERLEY MITCHELL
Star Staff Reporter

SHERBROOKE — A 23-year-old University of Sherbrooke student emerged visibly shaken from the first half of a panel discussion held yesterday at the conclusion of a three-day symposium on reproduction and population control.

"I always took it for granted that someday I'd have a couple of kids," he said. "Now I guess I won't."

His change of heart was understandable to any one who had sat in on the morning's discussions, during which the problem of control of the world's population was pondered by the panel and the 200 scientists attending the meeting. The picture painted by the seven scientists and doctors on the panel was not a pretty one.

Dr. A. F. Guttmacher, president of the International Planned Parenthood-World Population Federation based in New York, said that if the present rate of growth continues, it is only a question of time before the world's population increases to the point where the earth can no longer support its hungry billions.

The world is, after all, "a finite place," he said.

Dr. M. M. Ketchel, of the Tufts University School of Medicine at Boston, raised the spectre of the use of compounds to produce mass infertility to halt population growth.

Dr. R. O. Greep, of the Laboratory of Human Reproduction and Reproductive Biology at Harvard University, despaired of imparting even the concept of contraception to persons in countries so deprived that 80 per cent of the population never see the inside of a school.

Religious opposition

And Dr. E. S. E. Hafez, of the Wayne State University School of Medicine at Detroit, raised the question of continued religious opposition to the concept of contraception.

Dr. Greep, in replying to this latter query, supplied one of the few light moments at the meeting when he said: "I think the authority of the Pope in the bedroom is vastly overrated."

And then he referred to Ireland and France, two predominantly Catholic countries, which have maintained population control successfully for more than 100 years.

Dr. Guttmacher, during the panel discussion and in a subsequent interview, said world population will climb to nearly seven billion by the end of the century, an increase of 400 per cent in 100 years. The world, he feels, has the next two decades to voluntarily slow the popula-

tion growth rate. Authorities should pull out "all the stops" and make all contraceptive methods available to society — including contraceptive devices, abortion and sterilization.

After this period, if the growth rate has not slowed, then involuntary controls will have to be imposed.

Dr. Ketchel said some experts have predicted the world's food supplies will be depleted by 1975, a mere five years from now. The development of hybrid rice may delay this deadline date, he said, but other factors could negate the benefits of this scientific advance — among them crop disease and fertilizers which deplete the soil so much they cannot be used.

Controls needed

He doubts whether social attitudes toward contraception will have changed enough during this period of time and that if food supplies do run out, involuntary controls will certainly have to be enforced.

He stressed the importance of this distasteful possibility being considered now, so that if it does become necessary at some future date, all the moral and ethical considerations will have been resolved.

Dr. C. W. Lloyd, of the Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology, opposed the idea of induced mass infertility because, he said, it might be interpreted as biological warfare by some developing countries. He also expressed doubt such a method could be put into action quickly enough to be effective and suggested as an alternative that penalties might be imposed on persons becoming pregnant when they were not supposed to.

Neither he nor any panel member could suggest what sort of penalties might be imposed, however, except for references to obvious measures like curtailment of tax benefits and baby bonuses, current birth incentives.

All agreed the question of population control is inextricably meshed with the whole problem of socio-economic conditions in the world's countries, of which two-thirds are developing nations.

People, the panelists agreed, must be educated to understand the necessity of population control, yet in many of the developing countries there is insufficient money to live on, and certainly not enough left over to provide education for the children. In the developed nations, Dr. Guttmacher said, the annual income is \$2-3,000 annually, in Bolivia and India, two developing nations, it is less than \$100 per year. Hence, the problem of overpopulation is perpetuated from generation to generation.

"It's going to require such sophisticated and intelligent good feeling (to solve this problem)," he sighed. "and in the U.S., for example, there are so few people who are willing to give up their two-car family kind of life to help poor people in Bolivia."

During the interview, he acknowledged the irony of scientists striving to defeat infertility and to prolong life among the elderly, while the world faces desperate crowding which could conceivably result in people being moved around the globe like chess pawns to the few empty spaces left.

He agreed that if birth rates are successfully controlled, there will be a larger proportion of elderly persons populating the earth and that this could present a problem for mankind.

"Then you don't get social progress. Change and progress, after all, come from young people."

He believes, nonetheless, in prolonging meaningful life and feels infertility should be cured because it is a "tremendous sorrow" to many couples. Reproduction, intelligently undertaken, is still a desirable, instinctive thing, he said.



So little time, so much to do...

... and look at you! Doorbell will ring any minute now. You haven't dressed. You haven't fixed your hair. You haven't even put on your face.

And you're shaking your legs!